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EPA's Continued Response to Columbia Shuttle Accident

February 2, 2003

In response to the tragic loss of the Space Shuttle Columbia, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) continues to assist the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) providing response operations to conduct environmental monitoring and assist in the clean up of hazardous materials. The EPA has a cadre of response managers, called On-Scene Coordinators, and scientific experts stationed across the states to ensure our readiness to assess environmental conditions and abate threats posed by hazardous materials. Also, the EPA has in place a national response network designed to ensure our resources can be deployed quickly to assist in emergency situations, and ensure our efforts are closely coordinated with federal, state and local responders.

Resources throughout the EPA (in Washington D.C., Texas, Atlanta, Kansas City, New Jersey and New York) are in full readiness to assist in assessing potential environment consequences, clean up hazardous materials, and assist in the collection of debris from this incident. Both our Washington and Dallas response centers continue to operate around-the-clock to collect information, assist local and state officials, coordinate federal response activities, and deploy essential personnel and equipment to the impacted communities. EPA has deployed highly skilled response managers to incident operation centers in Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana, and FEMA Command Center in Denton, Texas and the Operations Center in Lufkin, Texas.

In close coordination with both FEMA and NASA, the EPA has dispatched teams of highly trained personnel and essential equipment within the impacted communities to conduct environmental monitoring to ensure public health is protected. In addition, the EPA will assist in collecting and removing debris to prevent the public from coming in direct contact with potentially hazardous chemicals should they be present.

In addition, EPA has mobilized Airborne Spectral Photo-Imaging of Environmental Contaminants (ASPECT) aircraft to help locate debris using infrared sensors to detect hazardous chemicals and deployed the Trace Atmospheric Gas Analyzer Unit to provide mobile analytical support.

NASA has asked that anyone who believes they have found debris should call the Johnson Space Center Emergency Operations Center at (281) 483-3388, and should be aware that hazardous chemicals may be present, and they should not disturb or remove any debris. All debris is United States Government property and is critical to the investigation of the accident. Any and all debris from the accident is to be left alone and reported to Government authorities. Unauthorized persons found in possession of accident debris will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

SITE: Regal Chemical Fire
BREAK: 17.7
OTHER: 1.2

